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Electorate's Turnout in South Vietnam

To the Editor:

Tom Wicker's Sept. 5 column asserts that the 83 per cent turnout in the South Vietnamese election "means less than meets the eye" on the ground that the turnout was this percentage "of less than a third of the nation, the rest having been disqualified as neutralists or Communists, or having simply been outside the reach of Saigon's authority."

Mr. Wicker also asserts that "all the votes cast were less than a majority of the potential of the South Vietnamese electorate."

Unfortunately Mr. Wicker's arithmetic is faulty. The reported turnout was 83 per cent of a total of registered voters comprising approximately 70 per cent of all the citizens of South Vietnam of voting age—i.e., 18 or over. It was thus somewhat over 56 per cent of the total potential electorate, substantially more than a majority and, incidentally, perhaps best to be compared with the 62 per cent of citizens of voting age who cast votes in the 1964 American elections.

There are other points in Mr. Wicker's column with which one could differ as a matter of judgment. However, the main thing is that his arithmetic is inaccurate, and leaves an impression that you may wish to correct for the benefit of your readers.

The basic estimates of South Vietnamese population (17 million) and of the number of citizens of voting age (about 8.5 million) have been explained to the press on several occasions, both before and after the election.

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